

**Jonathan S. Adelstein**  
**Commissioner, Federal Communications Commission**  
**Remarks at the National Conference for Media Reform**  
**St. Louis, Missouri**  
**Saturday, May 14, 2005**

We've come a long way since we last met in Madison. I'll never forget how Bill Moyers traced our heritage back to the revolutionary spirit of our founding fathers. Like those brave patriots, we've overcome enormous odds in beating those who by all accounts appeared stronger than us.

We won this first big battle because like the first patriots, we were fighting for our country -- and we fought for it with the belief of our revolutionary forbearers that the price of liberty is eternal vigilance.

We hear a lot of talk about freedom and democracy. How about uplifting the quality of our own freedom and democracy right here at home? The whole world *is* watching. We need to lead by example.

What our media produces is exported around the globe as the most influential expression of our culture. We can't afford to simply reinforce negative stereotypes of an increasingly violent and coarse culture. Our media should reflect the diversity and the rich artistry that is our true character -- the Spirit of St. Louis as we are voicing it here today.

Even as we fight media consolidation, we need to fight one of its most pernicious symptoms -- the increasing commercialization of the media. Thinly disguised payola fueling homogenized corporate music with no room for new, vibrant or local artists; video news releases masquerading as news; PR agents pushing political and commercial agendas squeezing out real news coverage and local community concerns; product placements turning news and entertainment shows alike into undisclosed commercials; rapacious advertisers preying on the unsuspecting minds of our young children.

Let me report some good news from Washington on this front. Two days ago, I testified before the Senate Commerce Committee about the need for the government to let viewers know when it is behind a video news release. We heard a bipartisan commitment to make a permanent fix requiring disclosure. So it looks like covert propaganda paid for with your tax dollars is getting the treatment it deserves.

But there's still much more to do. You are the troops that can and will call corporate media to account. Here's what you need to do. One, if you see a video news release, you see a product placement, or you see a news segment that looks like an advertisement -- hit the record button on your VCR or your TIVO. Two, check if there is a disclosure anywhere in the broadcast. If not, it may be payola -- a violation of the law and FCC rules. Three, if you catch them red handed, send a formal complaint to the FCC -- be sure to copy me. We'll get it investigated. Together, we can shut down this fraud perpetrated on the American people.

Thanks to all of you, we've gotten the whole country up in arms over media concentration. While we continue that fight, we can do the same with rampant commercialism.

You've galvanized everyone's attention, including the FCC, Congress, the White House and the Courts.

You've made media ownership the third rail of FCC politics. You are the energy that charges it up and makes people in Washington very, very nervous about touching it again. Keep that energy flowing through it so if anyone does dare to touch it, they get the jolt they should have expected.

We are going to need all the energy you can muster. We've got to open our airwaves -- we've got to restore public interests obligations on broadcasters as they enter the digital age -- and we've got to keep the Internet open and free.

We want to keep power from concentrating in the hands of a few media giants, and restore control to our local communities. That means building municipal broadband - - that means maintaining PEG access -- that means opening new wireless broadband spectrum for community programming -- and that means low power FM.

We have to protect our legacy as Americans -- the free flow of ideas and information that our Revolution secured. Like the Revolutionary minutemen before you, our very democracy depends on you. And like them, it is you whose fight and whose victories will be remembered and celebrated for generations to come. Thank you.